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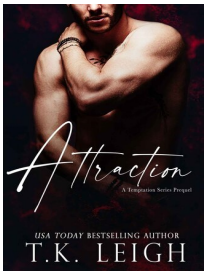

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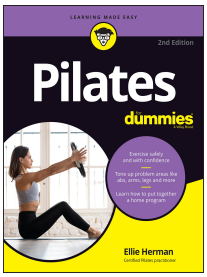

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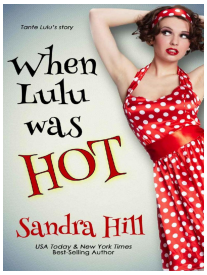

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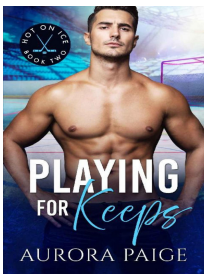

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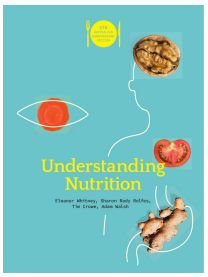

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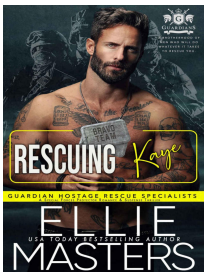

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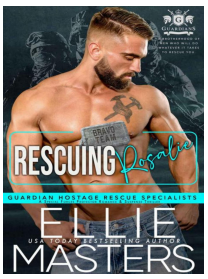

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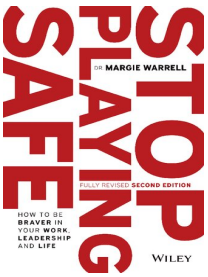

ELLIE WHITE
Playing For
YOU
A WEARSIDE STORY NOVELLA 0.5

PLAYING FOR HER

A Wearside Story Novella

Ellie White

E White Publishing

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Standalone Novels

Love & London
Love in the Wings

A Wearside Story

Book 0.5 - Playing For You (A Wearside Story Novella)
Book 1 - Playing For Her
Book 2 - Playing For Real - April 2024

Romance Redefined - Novellas

A Romance For Christmas
The Romance Retreat - July 2024
Untitled

CHAPTER ONE

Natasha

For the fourth time in sixty-seven minutes, the opposing team's star striker goes on the attack. She keeps the ball close as she weaves her way through my defensive line and mere seconds later, when her boot connects sharply with the ball, she fires it straight towards the bottom-right corner of my goal.

Without a second thought for my own well-being, I dive to the ground with my arms outstretched in an attempt to claw back some dignity in this match. The ball barely grazes my fingertips as it hurtles past me, hitting the back of the net with that all-too-familiar swoosh, leaving me red faced and covered in mud and grass from the drizzle drenched pitch.

"Fuck!" Rolling over to my front and up onto my knees, I pound my fists hard into the grass like a toddler having a tantrum. I curse and yell and scream into the mud, slapping my gloved hands hard to the ground to push myself to my feet with a growl.

Our opposition are understandably elated, celebrating loudly as their fans cheer in unison.

On our side of the stadium, our fans are eerily silent as the rainfall mirrors the atmosphere. Many fans have left already, leaving vast empty spaces in the stands, and I don't blame them, this is the latest in a long line of losses for Wearside Women.

"Pull it together and communicate, come on!" our team captain, Brooke, shouts across the pitch to our defence. "Keep it tight and close the gaps! We're better than this, girls!"

This is embarrassing, the voice in my head screams. *Pathetic.*

Useless. Talentless—

"Ha'way, Lasses!" I clap my hands loudly and try my best to keep some of that team spirit our coach always bangs on about.

Fake it 'til you make it, that's what they say, right?

Your parents are right. The statement in my head jolts me. *Failure, failure, failure*.

The cold rain falls in larger droplets now, splashing on my face. My breaths come fast and harsh, leaving little puffs of steam suspended in the air.

I can't do this.

A whistle from the ref signals for play to continue, but I can't bring myself to take the goal kick. Instead, I stand with the ball in my hands, resolve weakening as all the fight evaporates from my body, leaving only nausea and disappointment in its place.

"Come on!" one of the opposition team shouts at me. "Stop wasting time!" another adds.

I look at them all watching me expectantly, and then to the ball that I let drop to the floor. Confusion ripples across the pitch from both sides.

Raising my arm, I signal to the dugout that I need to come off, and a moment later, my feet carry me from the pitch and into the dressing room showers where I sit under the stream of warm water, fully clothed with my head in my hands for the remainder of the match.

Brooke Davison is my best friend. She also happens to be my captain and teammate, and this means she usually bears the brunt of my bad attitude. Today is no different as we sit side by side on the wooden slats of the bench in the dressing room. Our eyes are closed, but only her breathing is even and steady as we 'meditate'.

"Natasha," she says in her calm and soothing voice that I equal parts love and hate, "breathe with me. You sound like the Big Bad Wolf huffing and puffing and blowing football stadiums down."

"This isn't working," I respond through gritted teeth.

I open one eye and sneak a peek at her. Her pretty face is soft and relaxed, unlike the frown distorting my features.

"Close your eyes please, Natasha," she says, her tone nice and calm.

"How do you do that?"

She didn't even open her eyes to look at me. "I can feel you glaring at me."

I silently mock her, mouthing her words sarcastically. "I can feel that too."

"Fine." I close my eyes and shake out my arms. "I'm ready, let's do this."

"Okay, listen to my breathing and match my rhythm." I do as she says, breathing in and out in a slow rhythm and gradually, my muscles do begin to relax, which is annoying because I didn't want her to be right. "Let go of the past. You can't change it, but we can learn from it."

"Okay, Raffki!" I snort and she flicks my thigh. "Ow. I'm sorry, but this is stupid."

"Then you need to find a way that works for you, because whatever this is"—she gestures in my general direction —"isn't healthy."

"I'm too old to change now, too long in the tooth."

"You're twenty-six!" she says in disbelief. "Natasha, I'm serious. I'm not going to address what happened with you out there just yet, I'll give you a few days to gather your thoughts first, but I need you to know I'm worried about you."

"Honestly, I'm done," I lie, and she knows it.

"Today isn't all on you. We had a bad game, we all made mistakes, and this is our time to reflect on that so we can move forward."

"Davison, you're up," Physio Phillipa comes to my rescue when she calls across the room, letting Brooke know it's her

turn for cold water therapy.

She pats my shoulder before she heads off to the ice bath and I sulk for a little while on my own. I try to breathe like Brooke taught me, but just as I feel my muscles relaxing again, the intrusive thoughts return.

CHAPTER TWO

Luke

"I've organised the plants together to make it easier for you," my sister Hannah says the second I walk through the door to her open-plan riverside apartment. Natural light floods through the French windows leading to the balcony.

"Hey, Luke, lovely to see you. How are you doing?... Oh, I'm fantastic, thanks so much for asking... You look great, bro... Thanks, sis, I had my hair and beard trimmed this morning like you told me to because you said I was starting to look like Bigfoot," I converse with myself sarcastically, but she pays no notice.

"Mmm-hmm, great. These plants here need watering once a week and spritzing with the spray in the morning and afternoon." She points to a number of potted plants crammed onto the kitchen windowsill and fixes me with a stern look, checking I'm listening. "Rotate them daily so they grow evenly."

"Got it."

"I've organised their food," she continues.

"Food? They're plants."

"Plants need food. Orchid food, rose food and everything else food," she instructs, pointing to the bottles lined up on her cluttered bookshelf. "Don't worry, I've left you a binder with instructions."

"Wonderful. Now, don't you have a plane to catch?" I clap my hands twice in encouragement.

"Don't forget Stanley, he's on the balcony," she adds as she pulls on her coat and rucksack.

"You've named them?"

"Yes, they all have names. They're written on the little lolly sticks in the soil." Of course, they all have names. "Okay. I'm ready," she adds with a squeal of delight.

I haul my sister's backpack down to my car and place it in the boot. She's heading to Australia for three months to conduct research into her master's in sports psychology and is leaving me in charge of her flat and her *babies,* aka her plants.

Her trip couldn't have come at a better time for me. I sold my house to move into a bigger one, which isn't quite ready yet, and by that, I mean it's still a building site. So, instead of paying for a hotel for three months, I'm moving into her flat in Sunderland city centre. It's a win win for both of us.

It's mid-morning when I drive her to the airport. Luckily the traffic isn't too heavy and we make it to the airport with plenty time. We head straight for check-in and then Starbucks for one last coffee together.

"You're going to be okay, right?" she asks as she pours sugar into her cup and stirs, her eyebrows knitting together.

"You're the one going off to another country, I'll be in the exact same spot you left me in when you get back."

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"That's my worry!"

I'm a gamer. I program and design games specifically for PlayStation and Xbox. It's intense work, especially when designing the initial concepts and coding. Therefore, I've developed a habit of dropping off the face of the earth for days at a time until my baby sister drags me back to the land of the living.

"I'm a twenty-eight-year-old man, I'll be fine."

"Well, I've set alarms on Alexa to give you reminders anyway."

The next ten minutes pass in companionable silence as we people-watch and drink our coffees until it's time to walk Hannah to security.

"Don't forget to send me updates on the game," she says as we come to a stop outside the security entrance. She turns to face me which makes what I'm about to tell her way harder.

"About the game…I've decided to withdraw my funding application."

At first, she doesn't say anything, she just stares at me, completely disgust on her face.

Quickly recovering, she lets me have it.

"No. You. Are. Not. Luke Ramshaw, pull yourself together for fuck's sake," she says, sounding just like Mam. Mam would have never sworn at me though.

"I don't know how I'll get it done, Han. I'm running out of time."

"This is a huge opportunity for you and your business. You can't throw that away. What you need is a little motivation. If you speak to the club, you know Auntie Mel will help you."

It's a good idea, one that's crossed my mind already, if only I could bring myself to make the call. "I'll think about it, but for now you need to get going. Message me on your stopovers, let me know you're safe," I say, changing the subject, tugging her close to me for a hug when we reach airport security. "And promise you'll ring me when you get to Sydney. I don't care what time it is."

She hugs me back tightly, letting the previous subject go.

"I promise I'll call you when I can, but, Luke, I'm a big girl, you don't need to be so overprotective. You should be making the most of not having me around to cramp your style. Better still, get back on the dating apps and have a good time!"

I hit her with an unamused glare. Overprotective is all I know. Dad died suddenly from a brain aneurysm when I was two and Hannah was a newborn. Then we lost Mam when I was eighteen, so I took custody of her, taking on the role of parent and big brother. Since then, it's been the two of us and this will be the longest we've ever been apart.

"I'm just saying, it's been a while since you've dated."

I don't tell her that the reason I haven't dated for a few years is because, as more than one ex put it, I'm too 'overprotective' and 'over- bearing'. It'll give her more fuel to add to the fire.

Instead, I say, “Yeah okay, I’ll think about it.” To get her off my back.

She stands on her tiptoes to ruffle my hair and punches my arm, her way of saying she’ll miss me, I’m sure.

“Bye, Luke! See you in three months!” she calls out with one Final free-spirited wave.

I wave back and watch her until she’s out of sight, blending in with other excited travellers. Hannah’s a grown woman, she’s tough, smart, and sensible.

She’s going to be fine. I’m going to be fine.

Oh god, who am I trying to kid? I’m already an anxious wreck.

Back at her flat, I take the time to find a home for my gaming equipment in her living room, avoiding the surfaces where the plants reside. I brought everything I need for three months of work: four monitors, various speakers and a PC I built from scratch when I was at uni.

On the coffee table, I neatly line up various controllers and connect my PlayStation and Xbox to the big TV on her wall. Before long, the space is organised and looks like something you’d expect to see on the Starship Enterprise, flashing lights and sleek black and silver electronics everywhere. I survey the set-up with wonder and adoration as if I’m looking at my first-born child.

I know I’m procrastinating when I make myself another coffee using Hannah’s fancy machine and sit on the balcony overlooking the River Wear. I need to make that call and as I toy with my phone, I can’t put it off any longer.

Raising the phone to my ear, I listen to the ringing until a familiar comforting voice answers that hurtles me ten years in the past.

I swallow down the lump in my throat and speak. “Hey, Auntie Mel. It’s Luke.”

CHAPTER THREE

Natasha

Unlike the weekend, Wednesday's match isn't as bad a loss. I only let one goal past me this time, and I manage to last the whole ninety minutes without having a complete breakdown.

"Seriously, I'm about to lose my fucking shit!" I say for the umpteenth time tonight. Okay, I might not have had a breakdown today, but I'm so fucking close to it tonight. This time it's not football related or even a problem I've brought on myself.

My lovely, sweet and silent next-door neighbour has gone away for three months.

My lovely, sweet and silent next-door neighbour's inconsiderate, video-game-playing brother is !at-sitting. Night after night, I've had to endure the sounds of guns shooting and stupid zombies groaning and moaning through the wall that connects our living rooms.

"I just want to fucking sleep," I whine.

"Surely it's not so bad from your bedroom," Bridget reasons, although she has to raise her voice to be heard which completely invalidates her point. Bridget O'Leary is my oldest friend. We met at primary school after her family moved from Ireland, and now she's head of the Wearside FC PR department. It's literally in her nature to be rational and non-confrontational at all times.

"Oh, you can. That godawful sound travels! Four nights this has gone on for! He's a fucking insomniac or something," I shout back, again struggling to be heard at my normal level.

"Why don't you go and politely ask him to turn the volume down? He probably doesn't realise you can hear it," Brooke suggests, also trying to be helpful. Only thing is, I don't want helpful resolutions. I want my closest friends to share in my complete and utter rage. She winces as a particularly brutal sound travels through the wall at this point I'm beginning to feel sorry for the zombies.

"Fuck it, let's go!" I stand abruptly from my sofa.

Dressed in our pyjamas and slippers, despite their protests, I drag both girls into the hallway with me for support. Bridget and Brooke share an apartment a few floors above me, so it's not strange to find us wandering the corridors between each other's flats in PJs. I can't say I've ever stormed the hallways of the building waging war though, so this is new for us.

When I come to a halt outside his door, I knock a little harder than I intend to. No one answers, so I try again harder. He's in there; his game is still playing the sounds of slaughtered zombies!

I look back to the girls who are watching me, clearly worried I'm on the verge of some homicidal meltdown.

“Maybe we should come back in the morning when you’ve calmed down?” Bridget whispers, leaning forward slightly to where I stand ahead of them.

“No fucking way! I’ll bet any money he’s a deadbeat gamer who doesn’t work and thinks it’s perfectly fine to play video games all night and sleep all day with no care or consideration for those of us who actually contribute to society.”

“Do you not think you’re being a little judgemental when you don’t know the guy?” Brooke asks.

Yes, I’m being judgemental, but I’m pissed off, so whatever.

Turning back to the door, I ignore her and do what any other batshit person would do in this situation and bang on the door, loud, hard and fast, until he answers, half-naked, looking a little panicked.

“Shit, what’s going on?” he asks, looking between the three of us, confusion etched in his beautiful face. Fuck, I was not expecting this! “Are you okay?” He glances down the corridor for signs of danger that don’t exist.

I know it’s stereotypical of me and since I’m a female footballer who hears all the stereotypes, I should know better, but when you see gamers in movies and on TV, they’re always super nerdy; pale and thin from staying indoors all day, but this guy… Shit, he’s gorgeous.

He’s tall. Very tall. I’m above average height for a woman at five foot eight and this guy has an easy six inches on me. He’s toned without being overly ripped. His shirtless torso is tight and firm with a light sprinkling of dark chest hair, and he has the most beautiful collarbones I’ve ever seen. I didn’t even realise I had a thing for collarbones, but hey, it’s apparently my new kink because I want to lick them.

But it’s his eyes that really suck me in. They’re the most brilliant shade of forest green I’ve ever seen. And they’re staring right at me.

Shit, *he’s* staring right at me, waiting for me to speak. His lips quirk as he notices and my gaze follows the curves.

“You’re loud!” I snap myself out of the trance he’s pulled me into. “I’m sorry?” His eyebrows pucker ever so slightly at my

aggression.

“Your games are loud,” I say, steadying my voice and recovering from my initial shock. I plant my hands firmly on my hips, taking a step closer to him.

I’m obviously not very intimidating because he smirks at me, actually fucking smirks, and leans against the doorframe, crossing his arms over his chest. Holy forearms, he has those too, all lean muscle and thick veins and…I’m losing focus again.

“I wear a headset,” he says simply, no apology in sight.

“Your headset is obviously not working,” I reply through gritted teeth.

“I’m sorry, I’ll check out the speakers because you shouldn’t be able to hear a thing.” He’s cool and collected when he runs his hand through his tousled deep brown hair.

“Well, make sure you do because some of us actually have jobs to go to and need a decent night sleep,” I say snidely. “Come on, let’s go,” I add for the benefit of the girls behind me who have been useless this entire time.

“You know, when you introduce yourself to someone, you’re supposed to give them your name,” he says as I walk away, a cocky confidence oozing out of him.

“And why is that?” I ask, turning back to face him, ignoring the giggles from Brooke and Bridget.

“It’s good manners.” He smirks at me once more from his doorway. “I’m Luke.”

“I’m Bridget, this is Brooke, and the grumpy one is Natasha,” Bridget says, helpfully looking between us when I don’t respond.

“Sort the noise out so I can sleep and we won’t have any other issues!” I grunt, throwing my hands in the air and storming back into my apartment.

“Goodnight, Natasha,” he calls after me, and honestly, I don’t hate the way that sounds.

CHAPTER FOUR

Natasha

Obediently, I follow Mam through the hallway of my childhood home to the dining room. It's hard to miss the large portrait held in a gilded frame. It's a photo of me standing between my proud parents at my university graduation or as Dad refers to it: a constant reminder of how much of a disappointment I am.

My parents are both solicitors at our family firm, Borthwick Law. My granddad, the original Borthwick, started the business and my dad started working there right out of secondary school. Throughout my life, it was well known that his intention was for me to follow in his footsteps, but all my five years studying law did was confirm that I absolutely did not want to work in that field.

I'm not cut out for an office.

"Hi, Dad," I say, walking into the dining room where he sits at the head of the table, reading a broadsheet newspaper.

"Darling." He offers me his cheek without looking up.

"How are you?" I press a kiss to his ageing skin before taking a seat at the formal place setting to his right. Dad is always impeccably smart, clean shaven and wears a freshly ironed shirt and trousers no matter where he is or what his plans are.

"Oh, you know, just another day of not having an heir to the firm," he says as if he's joking, but it's been said enough times that I know he's serious. This time I doubt it took him two minutes to get his jibe in. "I saw the result the other night, it was on the news. They were talking about you." My heart sinks to my toes. I learned a long time ago not to read articles about myself and to fast forward through the highlights when they cover Wearside Women. My dad, on the other hand, has not.

"Oh right… We're going through a rough patch as a team at the moment but with a little hard work, I'm sure we'll pick it up again."

"Do you not think it's about time you give up the hobby and do something meaningful with your life?" he asks, placing the paper down in front of him. "You could be out there making a difference to people's lives."

Here we go.

"I love my job, Dad." Even I can tell I sound less than convincing.

"Sweetheart, the best thing happened at work this week," Mam says, saving me from the conversation as she places our plates in front of us.

"Yeah?" I ask, feigning enthusiasm. If Dad tries to shame me into joining the family business, Mam tries to convince me that working in law is the best thing in the world. She amps up her job satisfaction at every opportunity to try and get me to see

the error of my ways.

"A woman came in with her son who's setting up a new business and needed some advice. It's so satisfying when you get to help people, you know. The look on his face made all that challenging work worth it." She clutches the napkin she's carrying to her heart.

"Sounds great, Mam."

"It really was."

She disappears into the kitchen again, returning a moment later with her own plate and takes a seat opposite me on Dad's other side.

In general, my mood is lower than it has been for weeks, but I don't think they notice as we eat in our usual silence. When we finish, I excuse myself for a breather by offering to clear the plates and stack the dishwasher.

"Dad isn't getting any younger," Mam says when I return to the table a few minutes later. She glances across at Dad who has gone back to his paper, completely uninterested in my company. "And neither am I," she adds.

"Are you trying to tell me one of you is sick?" Panic surges through me. Is that what tonight is about?

"No, of course not. I'm just saying, we'd like to retire soon, and the firm will be your responsibility. You'll need to go back to school for a refresher before you take over, of course. It has been a few years since you graduated."

"I'm not a lawyer, Mam. I don't want to take over."

"This is our family legacy, Natasha," Dad says sternly, slamming his paper down on the table, making me jump. "You're our only child. It's up to you to keep it going when we're gone."

"But I don't want to, Dad. I'm sorry."

"Do you realise how juvenile you sound? You have five, maybe ten years of your footballing career left at the very most. Then what?"

"I don't know. I have plenty of time to decide what path I take when I'm done playing."

"That's the best part. You don't have to decide because you have the law firm, sweetheart," Mam adds calmly with a sickly sweet smile.

"I don't want it." Short of stomping my feet, I have no idea how to get this across to them. "I don't want the firm!"

"Why do you have to be such an ungrateful little girl? After everything we've done for you. This is your legacy."

"I'm not ungrateful! And I'm not a little girl! I want to live my life how I see fit." I stand abruptly, refusing to take any more. It's the last straw. "I have to go. I've got a match tomorrow and I need a good night's sleep."

"We'll see you on the six o-clock news then," Dad snaps, and with that I walk out, slamming the door behind me like the child they think I am.

I'm used to these nights ending like this, but it doesn't make it hurt any less. Tears sting my eyes all the way home and

when I eventually reach the door to my apartment, the one person I don't need to see is coming out of his.

"Natasha? Are you okay?" His voice is full of concern, but I'm a fucking coward so I ignore him, closing myself away in the safety of my flat like I have every other time I've seen him since our run-in the other night.

As I lie in bed a little while later and everything is quiet, I realise I miss the sounds of Luke's video games. Because without the incessant shooting and zombie cries, the voices and doubts that play in my mind as I stare at my ceiling are much harder to ignore.

CHAPTER FIVE

Luke

"So, shall we talk about this proposal you have?" Auntie Mel asks as I sit across from her in her office at the Wearside FC training academy. She's trying her best to keep her poker face in place, but any minute now, the grin she's been suppressing since I walked through the door fifteen minutes ago is going to burst out of her.

Mel isn't a blood-related auntie; she was Mam's best friend. They both played professional football here at Wearside Women when I was a kid. The club became a second family to us when we lost Dad. We were here so often it was like we lived here.

Mam died here too. She walked out of the tunnel into a packed stadium and five minutes later suffered a heart attack and collapsed in the penalty box while Hannah and I watched from the stands with thousands of others.

After I lost Mam, I grew to despise the game that cruelly took her away from us, but I'd still bring Hannah here almost every day. My sister loves any kind of sport, but especially football and I couldn't take that away from her. I'd drop her off after school while I went to my uni classes on an evening. When she was old enough to drive, she didn't need me to bring her anymore, so I stopped coming altogether.

It was easier to leave this world behind than confront my feelings head on and unfortunately that meant leaving Mel behind too.

But the way she's welcomed me back with open arms, as if I didn't turn my back on her for all these years, makes me realise what a big mistake I made and now I'm here, I hope I get a chance to rectify that.

I clear my throat. "I've designed a basic concept for a game based on women's football. Like FIFA but for the Women's Super League to start, hopefully extending to the Championship. I need to pitch for the licence and apply for funding and I've hit a mental block. In return for sponsorship next season, I'd like access to the academy and the team to help with the development of the video game," I say. "I can't offer you exclusivity in the marketing, but I can guarantee Wearside Women will be heavily promoted within the game and the advertising campaigns."

"You don't need to offer sponsorship, Luke. You're welcome here anytime and we're happy to help." Her voice is kind and reassuring. She knows how hard it was for me to come here today.

"I've looked at the club records, Mel. Cash is low and if you get relegated this season, you'll lose your primary sponsor. You'll never get that level of sponsorship from another company if you go down a league. The team won't be able to survive it, especially not when the men's first team are in the same position." I meet her gaze, adding, "I can't let that happen to her club when she fought so hard to get the women's team off the ground in the first place."

She nods her silent understanding. “I’m impressed. You did your homework. I do need to sign new players if we’re going to survive this season and there are a few in the academy I’ve had my eye on. If you’re serious about this”—she produces a manilla file, handing it over her cluttered desk to me—“these are our current sponsorship packages.”

I open the folder as she watches me intently. I already looked into their sponsorship packages whilst doing my research on the club, but I still peruse the page.

“I’ll take full secondary sponsorship for three years until the game is released. Then we can negotiate again, if necessary.” I close the folder and place it down gently.

“On behalf of the club welcome back to the family,” Mel says with a grin, offering her hand and we shake on the deal. “Bridget O’Leary is our head of PR and marketing. I’ll get her to come and see you to sort out the finer details, while I head out with the girls for this morning’s training session. If you’re happy to stick around, I can introduce you when they’re done.”

“That sounds great,” I say excitedly, hope already starting to bubble up in my stomach. “Would you mind if we don’t tell them who Mam was right away though? It’s not that I don’t want them to know, but people tend to look at me differently when they know.”

“Of course,” she agrees, then picks up the phone and asks Bridget to come fetch me.

Familiarity settles over me for a second, but I have trouble placing the name until a beautiful woman with jet black hair appears in the doorframe of Mel’s office. Unlike the last time I saw Bridget—dressed in pyjamas with Natasha and their other friend Brooke in the hallway—she’s a stone faced professional, her hair styled in neat Jessica Rabbit waves, dressed in a perfectly fitted burgundy dress and heels so high they look impossible to walk in.

“This is Luke Ramshaw. His company is going to be a secondary sponsor this season in exchange for the expertise of the club. Could you draw up the sponsorship contract please?” Mel says, and Bridget turns to face me, recognition dawning on her.

“This is wonderful!” Her eyes shine with excitement, although I can’t work out why given the complicated situation I have with her friend who’s obviously still mad at me. “What exactly do you mean ‘expertise of the club’?”

“Access to the players, staff and the facilities. While you’re at it, sort him a season card for the rest of the season and get him a temporary ID badge for the academy.” Mel stands, gathering an iPad and notebook from her desk, so I follow suit. “I’ll arrange to have a copy of our schedule for the next few weeks sent over to you this afternoon, so you can plan what you need around that. Bridget will accompany you in the meantime and we’ll call a meeting in the media room to announce it to the team after the session.”

“Thank you, Mel. I really appreciate it,” I say sincerely before turning to Bridget who is still grinning like a Cheshire cat. “Lead the way.”

An hour later, when all the official documents are signed and I’ve cleared the air with Bridget, we’re standing in the

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"But you never married any one else," thought the lawyer, "and you remember it now." All this was thought in the lowest possible tone, so that Satan himself could hardly hear it, but Lord Ashborough went on. "I never, indeed, remembered the business more, till, on lending the money to his father, I found from a letter which the late man, let me see that the present man, had not forgiven me some little progress I had made in the lady's affection. He said--I recollect the words very well--He said, that he could have borne his father borrowing the money at any rate of interest from any person but myself, who had endeavoured to supplant him--and all the rest that you can imagine. Well, from that moment I determined to bow that man's pride, for his own sake, as well as other people's. I thought I had done so pretty well too; but, on my refusing to suffer the redemption--which no one can doubt that I had a right to do--he wrote me that letter;" and his lordship threw across the table, to his solicitor, the letter which he had taken out of the drawer, just as the other entered. It was in the form of a note, and couched in the following terms:--

"Sir Sidney Delaware acknowledges the receipt of Lord Ashborough's letter, formally declining to accept the offer he made to redeem the annuity chargeable upon the estate of Emberton. The motives, excuses, or apologies--whichever Lord Ashborough chooses to designate the sentences that conclude his letter--were totally unnecessary, as Sir Sidney Delaware was too well acquainted with Lord Ashborough, in days of old, not to appreciate fully the principles on which he acts at present.

"EMBERTON PARK, 1*st September*, 18--."

"Infamous! brutal! heinous!" cried Mr. Tims. "What does your lordship intend to do? I hope you will, without scruple, punish this man as he deserves. I trust that, for his own sake, you will make him feel that such ungrateful and malignant letters as that, are not

to be written with impunity--ungrateful I may well call them! for what cause could your lordship have to write to him at all, except to soften the disappointment you conceived he would feel?"

"You say very true, Mr. Tims," replied Lord Ashborough, with a benign smile. "You say very true, indeed; and I do think myself, in justice to society, bound to correct such insolence, though, perhaps, I may not be inclined to carry the chastisement quite so far as yourself."

"Nothing could be too severe for such a man!" cried Mr. Tims, resolved to give his lordship space enough to manœuvre in, "Nothing could be too severe!"

"Nay, nay, that is saying too much," said Lord Ashborough, "We will neither hang him, Mr. Tims, nor burn him in the hand, if you please," and he smiled again at his own moderation.

"A small touch of imprisonment, however, would do him a world of good," said Mr. Tims, feeling his ground--Lord Ashborough smiled benignly a third time. "But the mischief is," continued the lawyer, "he pays the annuity so regularly that it would be difficult to catch him."

"That is the reason why I say we have done wrong in refusing to allow the redemption," rejoined the peer. "Do you not think, Mr. Tims, some accident might occur to stop the money which he was about to borrow for the purpose of redeeming; and if we could but get him to give bills payable at a certain day, we might have him arrested, in default?"

The lawyer shook his head. "I am afraid, my lord, if you had permitted the redemption, the money would have been ready to the minute," he said. "My uncle, I hear, was to have raised it for him; and, as he was to have had a good commission, it would have been prepared to the tick of the clock."

"And was your uncle to have lent the money himself, sir?" demanded Lord Ashborough, with a mysterious smile of scorn. "Did your uncle propose to give the money out of his own strongbox?"

"No, my lord, no!" replied Tims, eagerly, "No, no! He would not do that without much higher interest than he was likely to have got. Had he been the person, of course your lordship might have commanded him; but it was to be raised from some gentleman connected with Messrs. Steelyard and Wilkinson--a very respectable law house, indeed!"

"Some gentleman connected with Messrs. Steelyard and Wilkinson!" repeated Lord Ashborough, curling his haughty lip; "and who do you suppose that gentleman is, but my own nephew Harry Beauchamp?"

The lawyer started off his chair with unaffected astonishment, the expression of which was, however, instantly mastered, and down he sat again, pondering, as fast as he could, the probable results that were to be obtained from this very unexpected discovery. Some results he certainly saw Lord Ashborough was prepared to deduce; and he knew that his only plan was to wait the developement thereof, assisting as much as in him lay, the parturition of his patron's designs. But Lord Ashborough having spoken thus far, found very little difficulty in proceeding.

"The simple fact is this, Mr. Tims," he said; "Harry Beauchamp, full of all the wild enthusiasm--which would have ruined his father, if we had not got him that governorship in which he died--to my certain knowledge has gone down to Emberton, with the full determination of assisting these people, of whom his father was so fond. I have reason to think even, that the coming up of that young man, the son, was at Henry's instigation, although they affected not to know each other, and I am told carried their dissimulation so far as to pass each other in the hall as strangers. At all events, they

went down together in a stage-coach, and are now beyond all doubt laying out their plans for frustrating all my purposes."

"Shameful, indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Tims.

"On Harry's part," replied Lord Ashborough, affecting a tone of candour and moderation; "on Harry's part it is but a piece of boyish enthusiasm--a touch of his father's folly. I love the boy, who, as you know, will succeed me--when it pleases Heaven," he added piously--"to remove me from this life. I love the boy, and I do not choose to see him spend his splendid fortune, which will make a noble addition to the family estates, upon a set of mean and designing beggars; and I wish at once to punish them for their low and cunning schemes, and to save my nephew from their snares. Can we not, Mr. Tims, do you think, hit upon some plan by which this may be effected?"

"Why, my lord," replied Mr. Tims, hesitating slightly, for he was totally unprepared either for the intelligence he had received, or the demand that followed it; "why, my lord, your lordship's views are as kind and generous as usual; and doubtless--doubtless we may soon devise some means by which your lordship's nephew may be extricated from this little entanglement--but it will, of course, require thought--though perhaps your lordship's clear and perspicuous mind may have already devised some project. Indeed, I cannot doubt it," he added, seeing a slight but well satisfied smile cross the features of the noble earl. "Your lordship has so much of what Burke used to call creative talent, that I doubt not you have already discovered the fitting means, and only require an agent in your most devoted servant."

"Something more, Mr. Tims, something more than a mere agent," replied Lord Ashborough. "I require your legal advice. We must proceed cautiously, and not suffer either zealous indignation, or regard for my nephew, to lead us into any thing that is not quite lawful. A slight scheme of the matter may, indeed, have suggested

itself to my mind, but I want you to consider it well, and legalize it for me, as well as some of the details. Could we not, I say--could we not--it is but a supposition you know, sir--could we not give notice to this Sir Sidney Delaware, that we are willing to permit the redemption; and even to give him time to pay the money, cancelling, in the mean time, the annuity deed"----

"Not before you have got the amount!" exclaimed the lawyer, in unutterable astonishment.

"Yes, sir, before I have got the amount," replied Lord Ashborough, phlegmatically, "but not before I have got bills or notes of hand, payable within a certain time, and with an expressed stipulation, that unless those are duly paid, the annuity itself holds in full force."

"Ay; but if they be paid, my lord," cried Mr. Tims, "the annuity is at an end; and then where is your lordship?"

"But cannot we find means to stop their being paid, Mr. Tims?" said Lord Ashborough, fixing his eyes steadily upon the lawyer. "In all the intricate chambers of your brain, I say, is there no effectual way you can discover to stop the supplies upon which this Delaware may have been led to reckon, and render him unable to pay the sum on the day his bills fall due? Remember, sir, your uncle is the agent, as I am led to believe, between this person and my nephew. Harry Beauchamp, forsooth, has too fine notions of delicacy to offer the money in his own person; but he is the man from whom the money is to come, and it has been for some weeks lodged in the hands of Steelyard and Wilkinson, his solicitors, awaiting the result--that is to say, the whole of it except ten thousand pounds in my hands, which I have promised to sell out for him to-morrow, and pay into their office. Are there no means, sir, for stopping the money?"

"Plenty, plenty, my lord!" replied the lawyer. "The only difficulty will be the choice of them. But, first, cannot your lordship refuse to pay the ten thousand?"

"That will not do," answered the peer. "I know Harry well; and his first act would be to sell out the necessary sum to supply the deficiency. You must devise something else."

"Let us make the bills payable at Emberton, my lord," said the attorney, "at the house of my uncle. Mr. Beauchamp must then either come to town for the money, or send some one to receive it; and in either case it may be staid."

"How so?" demanded Lord Ashborough. "If he come, the matter is hopeless. He has sold out of the army too; so there is no chance of his being called away there."

"Ay; but there is a little process at law going on against him, my lord," replied the attorney, of which he knows nothing as yet. "Some time ago, he threw the valet he had then, down stairs, head foremost, for seducing the daughter of his landlady. The fellow has since prosecuted him for assault, and served the process upon me, whom he employed in the affair. I am not supposed to know where he is, so that the matter may be easily suffered to go by default; and, one way or another, we can contrive to get him arrested for a day or two, no doubt--especially as it is all for his own good and salvation, I may call it."

"Certainly, certainly!" answered Lord Ashborough. "I should feel no scruple in doing so; for no one could doubt that I am actuated alone by the desire of keeping him from injuring himself. But suppose he sends, Mr. Tims?"

"Why, that were a great deal better still!" said the lawyer. "The only person he could send would be his servant, Harding, who owes me the place; and who, between you and I, my lord, might find it difficult to keep me from transporting him to Botany Bay, if I chose it. He would doubtless be easily prevailed upon to stop the money for a time, or altogether, if it could be shown him that he could get clear off, and the matter would be settled for ever."

There was a tone of familiarity growing upon the lawyer, as a natural consequence of the edifying communion which he was holding with his patron, that rather displeased and alarmed Lord Ashborough, and he answered quickly, "You forget yourself, sir! Do you suppose that I would instigate my nephew's servant to rob his master?"

Mr. Peter Tims had perhaps forgot himself for the moment; but he was one of those men that never forget themselves long; and, as crouching was as natural to him as to a spaniel, he was instantly again as full of humility and submission as he had been, previous to the exposé which had morally sunk Lord Ashborough to a level with Mr. Tims. "No, my lord! No!" he exclaimed eagerly, "Far be it from me to dream for one moment that your lordship would form such an idea. All I meant was, that this servant might easily be induced to delay the delivery of the money, on one pretext or another, till it be too late; and if he abscond--which perchance he might do, for his notions concerning property, either real or personal, are not very clearly defined--your lordship could easily intend to make it good to Mr. Beauchamp."

"I do not know what you propose that I should easily *intend* Mr. Tims," replied Lord Ashborough; "but I know that it would not sound particularly well if this man were to abscond with the money, and there were found upon his person any authorization from me to delay discharging his trust to his master."

"Oh, my lord, that difficulty would be easily removed!" answered Mr. Tims. "The law is very careful not to impute evil motives where good ones can be made apparent. It will be easy to write a letter to this man--what one may call a fishing letter--to see whether he will do what we wish, but stating precisely that your lordship's sole purpose and view is to save your nephew from squandering his fortune in a weak and unprofitable manner. We can keep a copy, properly authenticated: then, should he abscond and be caught with the letter on him, your lordship will be cleared; while if, on being

taken, he attempt to justify himself at your lordship's expense, the authenticated copy will clear you still."

"That is not a bad plan," said Lord Ashborough, musing. "But what if he draw for the money through your uncle, Mr. Tims? Do you think the old man could be induced to detain the money, or to deny its arrival for a day or two?"

"Why, I fear not, my lord," answered the other, shaking his head; "I fear not--he was five-and-thirty years a lawyer, my lord, and he is devilish cautious.--But I will tell you what I can do. I can direct him to address all his letters, on London business, under cover to your lordship, which will save postage--a great thing in his opinion--and, as he holds a small share of my business still, I can open all the answers. So that we will manage it some way."

Lord Ashborough paused and mused for several minutes, for though his mind was comparatively at ease in having found his lawyer so eager and zealous in his co-operation; yet a certain consciousness of the many little lets and hindrances that occur in the execution of the best laid schemes, made him still thoughtful and apprehensive. Did you ever knit a stocking? No! nor I either--nor Lord Ashborough, I dare say, either. Yet we all know, that in the thousand and one stitches of which it is composed, if a single one be missed, down goes the whole concatenation of loops, and the matter is just where it began, only with a ravelled thread about your fingers and thumbs, which is neither pleasant nor tidy. This consideration had some weight with the earl; so, after thinking deeply for several minutes, he rejoined,--"The matter seems clear enough, Mr. Tims, but I will put it to yourself whether you can carry it through successfully or not--Hear me to an end, sir--I will on no account agree to the redemption of the annuity, if you are not certain of being able to bring about that which we propose. So, do not undertake it unless you can do so. If you do undertake it, the odds stand thus--You have five hundred pounds in addition to your

fees if you be successful, but, if you fail, you lose my agency for ever."

"My lord," replied Tims, who was not a man to suppose that cunning could ever fail. "I will undertake the business and the risk. But, of course, your lordship must give me all your excellent advice, and your powerful assistance. In the first place, you must allow me to bid my uncle send all his letters, and direct all the answers to be sent under cover to your lordship, and, in the next place, you must allow me to write immediately to this man Harding in your name."

"Not without letting me see the letter!" exclaimed Lord Ashborough. "But that of course; and if you succeed, the five hundred pounds are yours."

"Your lordship is ever generous and kind," replied Peter Tims, "and I will undertake to carry the matter through; but only"--and Mr. Tims was honest for once in his life, from the fear of after consequences--"but only I am afraid your lordship will not find the result put this Sir Sidney Delaware so completely in your power as you think."

"How so?" demanded Lord Ashborough, turning upon him almost fiercely. "How so, sir? How so?"

"Why, my lord," replied Mr. Tims, in a low and humble tone, "even suppose he is arrested, depend upon it, he will very easily find some one to lend him the money on the Emberton estates, to take up the bills he has given."

The earl's eye flashed, and the dark and bitter spirit in his heart broke forth for the first time unrestrained. "Let me but have him in prison!" he exclaimed, "Let me but have him once in prison, and I will so complicate my claims upon his pitiful inheritance, and so wring his proud heart with degradations, that the beggar who robbed me of my bride, shall die as he has lived, in poverty and disappointment!" and in the vehemence with which the long

suppressed passion burst forth, he struck his hand upon the table, till the ink-glasses danced in their stand.

Mr. Tims could understand envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness; but he was cowed by such vehemence as that into which the bare thought of seeing his detested rival in prison, had betrayed his noble patron. Feeling, too, that he himself was not at all the sort of spirit to rule the whirlwind and direct the storm, he said a few quiet words about preparing every thing, and waiting on his lordship the next morning, and slunk away without more ado.

CHAPTER X.

This chapter shall be, I think, what that delightful wight, Washington Irving, would call a Salmagundi, or as it should be, perhaps, a *Salmi à la Gondi*; but having mentioned that name, Irving I dedicate this book to you. It is long since we first met--long since we last parted--and, it may be, long, long, ere we meet again. Nevertheless, Heaven speed you, wherever you are, and send you forward on your voyage, with a calm sea, and a swelling sail! In all the many that I have known, and amongst the few that I have loved and esteemed, there is not now a living man that can compete with you in that delightful conversation, where the heart pours forth its tide; and where fancy and feeling mingle together, and flow on in one ever sparkling stream. The dim Atlantic, whose very name sounds like that of eternity, may roll between us, till death close the eyes of one or the other; but till the things of this world pass away, you shall not be forgotten.

Although we have now brought up the events in London nearly to the same point as the events in the country, we must still leave Henry Burrel strolling on through Emberton Park beside Blanche Delaware, while we turn for a moment to his silent servant, who having, on the same morning, walked with his usual slow and quiet step to the post-office, brought home, and deposited upon his masters table, two or three letters, after first gleaning every possible information that their outside or their inside could furnish. He then proceeded to inspect the contents of another epistle, which bore his own name and superscription. The words therein written had a considerable effect upon him, causing more twitches and contortions of the muscles of his countenance, than was usually visible upon that still and patient piece of furniture. The first expression was certainly full of pleasure; but that soon relapsed into deep thought, and then a grave shake of the head, and close setting of the lower jaw, might be supposed to argue a negative determination. "No, no, Mr. Tims," he muttered, "that wont do! If one could make sure of getting clear off--well and good. But first, there is the chance of my not being sent for the money--then you would take good care to have me closely watched; and then, again, I do not know whether the chance here at Emberton may not be worth ten of the other--and I may come in for my share of the other too. No, no, Mr. Tims, it won't do!--so I will come the conscientious upon you." And down he sat to indite an epistle to Mr. Peter Tims, the agent of Lord Ashborough. It was written in one of those fair, easy, but vacillating, running-hands, which bespeak a peculiar and inherent gift or talent for committing forgery; and was to the following effect:--

"Emberton, *September*, 18--

"SIR--Your honoured letter was duly received this morning; and I hasten to reply, as in duty bound. I am very sure that such honourable gentlemen as my lord the earl and yourself, would not

undertake any thing but upon good and reasonable grounds; but, hoping that you will pardon my boldness in saying so much, yet I cannot imagine that I have any other than a straightforward duty to perform--namely, when my master sends me for any sum of money, or other valuable thing, to hasten to give it up into his hands as soon as I have received it; which I would certainly do, in case he should send me up to London, although I do not think it probable he will. It is very true, certainly, that I do think our notions of property are very confined and wrong; and that no man should have at his disposal a superabundance, while another man is wanting the necessaries or even conveniences of life; and that, if things were equally distributed, a better system must spontaneously arise. This much I have learned by reading; and I heartily wish that the principles of regeneration, which are at present in active existence amongst the operative classes, may go on to complete a change of the old corrupt system. Nevertheless, until such time as the intellect of the country in general shall have worked such results, I can be doing no wrong in following the laws and usages established; and shall, consequently, abstain from acting upon the abstract principles of general utility, until such time as the general welfare may require a physical demonstration of popular opinion.

"In regard to certain passages of my past life, to which you are pleased to refer; although I believe that I could perfectly justify myself upon my own fixed principles for every thing that I have done through life; yet I am sorry that any thing should have occurred to make you for a moment doubt the integrity of a person you strongly recommended to Mr. Beauchamp; and I am determined to do nothing that shall confirm any evil opinion you may have unfortunately been led to form, or to make my master regret having listened to the recommendation which you formerly thought fit to give your very humble and most obedient servant,

"STEPHEN HARDING."

Having penned this delectable epistle, and read it over more than once, with much genuine satisfaction at the skill with which he had endeavoured to raise his own character, while rejecting the offers of Mr. Tims, Harding sealed it up, and hastened to put it in the post. He then sauntered slowly through the town; and having visited the widow's cottage, and conversed for a few minutes with her son, he proceeded to walk on in the same direction, which we have seen Burrel pursue upon a former occasion, shortly after his first arrival at Emberton. The purpose of the silent servant, however, was not to visit the old miser of Ryebury in person; and, ere he had gone a quarter of a mile upon the road, he was joined by the same bold vulgar personage who had, during part of the journey, occupied a place in the stage-coach which brought his master to Emberton.

They met evidently as old and familiar friends, and with that sort of easy nonchalance which bespoke that their meeting was not unexpected. The servant pursued his way, scarcely pausing to say the necessary passwords of civility, and the other, turning onward upon the same path, walked by his side, with his arms bent behind his back, conversing, not exactly in an under voice, but rather in that between-the-teeth sort of tone, which renders what is said more difficult to be understood by any one not quite near, than even a whisper.

The terms in which they spoke, also, were somewhat enigmatical, and none, probably, but the initiated, could have discovered their views or purposes by such terms as the following.

"I have just been thinking last night. Master Harding," said his new companion, "that we had better get the other job done as soon as possible. We are wasting time, I thinks, and it seems to me as how you are growing something squeamish."

"You are a fool, Tony," replied Harding, civilly; "you are a fool for thinking any thing of the kind. I'll tell you what, you may count yourself extremely well off that you have fallen in with a man of

principle and education like myself, or you would have put your neck in a noose long ago. You take no extended views of things; and, instead of acting upon principle, which would always make you cautious in regard to times and seasons, and means and methods, you go bolt on, and would run your head into the stone pitcher, if I were not by to pull you back by the heels."

"Well, I think you're a rum covey, now!" replied the other; and was proceeding in the same strain, when he was stopped by his companion exclaiming--"Hush, hush! Curse your slang, it will betray you as soon as the mark of the hot iron would. Look here, now. I am no more squeamish than you are. I always act upon principle; and as to the job before us, considering the sum of general utility that is to be gained, I see no objection to doing the matter completely--I mean, making a finish of it. You understand? But where is the hurry? Let us go cautiously to work, learn our ground, and get every thing prepared.--I say, where's the hurry?"

"As to the matter of that," answered the other, "there mayn't be no great hurry, to be sure. But we're both wasting our time somewhat; and, besides, they are looking out sharp after that other job--you see they have digged for the plate like mad--so that there is no use staying longer nor necessary, you know?"

"Don't be afraid!" answered Harding, coolly, "They can make nothing of that. Besides, look here, Smithson; if we wait four or five days longer, there will be five-and-twenty thousand pounds down from London."

"Whew!" whistled Mr. Anthony Smithson, laying one finger on the side of his nose. "That is a go! But are you sure?"

"I never say any thing without being sure," answered Harding, with laconic pomposity. "So make yourself easy on that score. I say there will be five-and-twenty thousand pounds down in three or four

days; and, if I know the old man right, the larger half will be in gold. Have you tried Sally the maid?"

"It won't do!" answered the other, with somewhat of a rueful face. "She has lived long enough with that old fellow, to be as cautious as a beak."

"Well, I suppose I must do that too!" answered the valet; "though it is a little tiresome, Master Smithson, that all the hard work is to fall upon me."

"Why, how the devil can I help it, Harding?" replied the other, "If the girl will have nothing to say to me, what can I do, you know? No, no, when it comes to the real hard work, you never find me behind!"

"Well, well," answered his worthy coadjutor, "I must come round her myself somehow, though she be but a dirty trapesing slut, that a man of gentlemanly feelings will find some difficulty in making love to--but, nevertheless, when one acts upon principle, one learns to overcome one's repugnance to such things, from a consideration of the mass of general utility to be obtained by a trifling sacrifice."

His companion grinned, but he was too well accustomed to Mr. Harding's method of reasoning to express any farther surprise. After a few words more on both sides, however, as they judged it expedient to be seen together as little as possible, those two respectable persons separated, and, while Anthony Smithson returned to the town, Harding pursued his way onward; and having, on the strength of the communication he had received, determined to proceed to Ryebury, he took the same path that Burrel had followed before him. The beauties of nature occupied less of his thoughts than those of his master; and while, with solemn steps and slow, he wandered on his way, his ideas were much fuller of shillings and sixpences, and trips across the Atlantic, than of the verdant mead and purling stream.

As I believe I have before said. Master Harding was by no means an ugly person; and the charms of his good looks, together with a marvellous sweet voice, and a good deal more eloquence of its own peculiar kind than any one could have suspected him to possess from his usual taciturnity, he was what the French render, with somewhat profligate decency, by calling the persons so gifted, *un homme à bonnes fortunes*. His expedition against the heart of Sally, the miser's maid, was more successful than that of his companion had been, and he returned home flattering himself on having made more progress than he had anticipated. In fact, he had been fortunate in finding Mr. Tims out, and Sally at home; but as the intrigues of a slattern and a valet form no part of the staple of this book, we shall leave the matter as it is, without any farther elucidation.

In the meanwhile, Burrel--for so we shall still call him--had sauntered on, whiling away the golden minutes of a fair day, on the early side of thirty, in sweet conversation beside a beautiful girl. I have described what their conversation was like before, and I leave every one who can remember what were the sensations he experienced, when deep and fervent love just began to break upon his heart, to imagine how sweet were the winged minutes as they flew. Even the unspoken consciousness was not a burden, but a joy; and though Blanche Delaware might be said to tremble at the feelings that were growing upon her, yet there was a sort of vague internal conviction that those feelings were reciprocal--that they could not thus have crept over her heart unless some, nay, many of the signs of similar sentiments, on his side, had been sufficiently displayed to make her feel secure that she did not love unsought. Still there would every now and then come a shrinking apprehension across her mind, that she might be deceived--that it might be all, merely a courteous and engaging manner, the same towards every one, which she in her ignorance had vainly fancied particular to herself. But those thoughts were but for a moment; and as Burrel walked onward by her side, there was in his tone, in his manner, and still more in the current through which all his thoughts appeared

now to flow, a balmy influence that seemed to soothe away every fear. She knew not well whence she derived that balm; for had she tried, which, by the way, she did not, she could not have found one particular word he spoke, which was more appropriate to the vocabulary of love than to Johnson's Dictionary. It was, perhaps--but she knew nothing about it--It was, perhaps, that pouring forth of the soul upon every topic, which can never take place but in conversation with one we love and esteem; for the hours of love are like a sunshiny day in the midst of summer, and all the flowers open, and the birds sing, and the bright things come forth through the hearts universe. It was this, perhaps, more than ought else in Burrel's manner, that made Blanche Delaware believe that she herself was loved.

It is sometimes a very difficult thing to get two people to acknowledge, in any language under the sun, the feelings that are passing in their hearts. It is more especially difficult in a book; for no author likes to tell how he and his managed the matter themselves--at least, if he be not an ass or a coxcomb--and any thing that is manufactured, is almost always "flat, stale, and unprofitable." A true story canters one easily over all such difficulties; and it so fortunately happened, that Henry Burrel and Blanche Delaware acknowledged it all without the slightest idea in the world that they were doing any thing of the kind.

There had been something spoken accidentally, that went too deep, and both felt, perhaps, though almost unconsciously, that nothing more could be said on that topic without saying more still; and as there was a third person by, of course the matter dropt, and equally of course, a long pause ensued, which grew unpleasant.

"I thought," said Burrel at length, "that we were to meet with some antiquities--even more interesting than the house itself--at least, your father said so;" and conscious that he had made an awkward speech, and very little to the purpose, Burrel looked up and

smiled, though many other men would have looked down and coloured.

"You are not far from them," replied Captain Delaware--for Blanche's eyes were fixed upon the ground, and her thoughts were--not at Nova Zembla. "But surely you are not tired?"

"Nay, nay, any thing but tired," answered Burrel; "but your father declared he would catechize me upon these ruins severely, and I was only afraid that I should forget them altogether."

"A piece of inattention, which Blanche or I would excuse much more readily than my father," replied the good-humoured sailor. "But we are close upon them. You see those two wooded banks that fall across each other, with the stream flowing out in foam from between them? They form the mouth of a little glen, about a hundred yards up which, stands the Prior's Fountain, and farther still the Hermit's Chapel. In architecture, I believe, they are unique, and there is many a curious tradition about both."

"Hush, hush, William!" cried his sister, seeing him about to proceed, "Never tell the traditions but upon the spot. Oh, an old legend, in these days of steam and manufactory, can never be properly told, except under the gray stone and the ivy, where the memories of a thousand years are carved by the chisel of time on every tottering pinnacle and mouldering cornice, which vouch, by their unusual forms, for the strange stories of their founders!"

"Oh, let us go on, by all means!" said Burrel, smiling; "an old legend is worthy of every accessary with which we can furnish it.--But there it is," he added, as they turned the angle of the bank, and, entering the little glen, had before them a small Gothic building, covered with the richest ornaments of the most luxurious age of Norman architecture. "That, I suppose, is the Chapel?"

"No, that is the Prior's Fountain," answered Captain Delaware; "and certainly the monks must have attached some peculiar

importance to it, from covering it over with so splendid a structure."

Another minute brought them near it, and Burrel found, that, under a beautiful canopy of stone-work, supported by eight cluster pillars, was placed a small stone fountain, full of the most limpid water, which, welling from a basin somewhat like the baptismal font of a Gothic church, poured through a little channel in the pavement, and thence made a small sparkling stream, which joined the larger one ere it had run fifty yards. Attached to the basin by an iron chain, was a cup of the same metal, of very ancient date, though, perhaps, more modern than the fountain. This cup, as soon as they approached. Captain Delaware dipped into the water, and, laughing gaily, held it to Burrel.

"You must drink of the Prior's Fountain, Mr. Burrel," he said; "but listen, listen, before you do so. The monks, you know, having vowed celibacy, found that the less they had to do with love the better; and it being luckily discovered that the waters of this well were a complete and everlasting cure for that malady, one of the priors covered it over, as you see, and enjoined that, on commencing his noviciate at Emberton, every pseudo monk should be brought hither, and made to drink one cup of the water. It is added, that the remedy was never known to fail, and now with this warning, Burrel, drink if you will."

Burrel by this time had the cup in his hand, and for a single instant his eyes sought those of Blanche Delaware. She was looking down into the fountain, with one hand resting on the edge. There was a slight smile upon her lip, but there was a scarcely perceptible degree of agitation in her aspect, at the same time, which Burrel understood--or, at least, hoped--might have some reference to himself, although she might believe as little as he did in the efficacy of the waters of the fountain.

"No, no!" he replied at once, giving back the cup to Captain Delaware, and laughing lightly, as people do when they have very

serious feelings at their hearts, "No, no! I dare not drink of such waters. They are too cold in every sense of the word to drink, after such a walk as this.--The very cup has frozen my hand!" he added, to take out any point that he might have given to his speech.

"He is actually afraid, Blanche!" cried her brother, laughing. "Come, show him what a brave girl you are, and drain the cup to the bottom!"

"No, indeed!" answered Blanche Delaware. "Mr. Burrel is very right. The water is a great deal too cold;" and, as she spoke, she blushed till the tell-tale blood spread rosy over her fair forehead, and tingled in her small rounded ear.

"Cowards both, as I live!" cried Captain Delaware, drinking off the contents, and letting the cup drop.--"Cowards both, as I live!" and, springing across the little streamlet, he took two or three steps onward, towards the chapel.

"Let me assist you across!" said Burrel, offering his hand. As his fingers touched those of Blanche Delaware, to aid her in crossing the rivulet, they clasped upon her hand with a gentle pressure of thanks--so slight that she could not be offended, so defined that she could not mistake. The natural impulse of surprise was to look up; and, before she could recollect herself, she had done so, and her eyes met Burrel's. What she saw was all kind, and gentle, and tender; but she instantly cast down her eyes, with another blush that was painful from its intensity, and with a single tear of agitation--and perhaps delight.

CHAPTER XI.

Sir Sidney Delaware was a peculiar character; and, if I had time, I would go on and make a miniature of him. But I have not time; and therefore, though there might undoubtedly be a great deal of pleasure in investigating all the little complex motives which made him do this thing or that thing, which seemed quite contrary to his general principles--a great deal of pleasure in finding out the small fine lines that connected together actions that appeared as opposite as light and darkness--yet, having a long journey before me, and very little time to spare, I must refrain from taking portraits by the roadside, leaving every pleasant gentlemen of my acquaintance to say, "That is not natural--this is out of character!" if he like.

One thing, however, I must notice, which was, that Sir Sidney Delaware was in some degree an indolent man--there was a great deal of the *vis inertiæ* in his constitution. His mind was naturally active enough, but the body clogged it, and even rendered it lazy too; and the opposition between a keen and powerful moral constitution, and an idle physical temperament, was the cause of many a contradiction in his conduct.

Such had been the case in regard to his daughter's visits to Mrs. Darlington. That good lady, when she first settled in the neighbourhood, had determined upon visiting the people at the Park; and though Sir Sidney for some time continued stiff, and cold, and stern--ay, and even rude--Mrs. Darlington persevered, and Mrs. Darlington carried her point.

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